

UPDATE: Return of Congolese refugees from Angola

11 November 2019



From 18 August, thousands of Congolese refugees **spontaneously left Lóvua refugee settlement** in Angola to make their way back home in the DRC.

A **Tripartite Agreement** was signed on 23 August between UNHCR and the Governments of Angola and DRC, in order to start organized Voluntary Repatriation movements.

On 9 October, the **first organized convoy movement** left Lóvua settlement with 218 persons on board. On 14 October, 177 arrived in Tshikapa, and 41 in Kamonia. Since then, two additional convoys have been organized, bringing the total to **844 repatriated so far** by UNHCR and partners.

In addition, UNHCR has provided cash and transportation assistance to **15,255 returnees** in Kasai and Kasai Central provinces¹.

Background

Back in 2017, the outbreak of violence in the Kasai region of DRC triggered the displacement of some 1.4 million people, and the flight of over 35,000 refugees to Lunda Norte Province, in Angola. After presidential elections in DRC in early 2019, some refugees approached UNHCR, expressing their wish to return home. UNHCR and partners subsequently conducted “intentions surveys” in May, showing that 85% of the refugees in Lóvua settlement wanted to come back to DRC. On 23 August, UNHCR signed a Tripartite Agreement with the Angolan and DRC Governments to put in place mechanisms for dignified and sustainable returns. Briefed in July by visiting DRC officials about improved living conditions in the Kasais, refugees decided to respond en masse and started to return immediately.



Current situation

Organized repatriations: Organized voluntary repatriation started on 9 October. As of 30 October, **844 Congolese refugees were repatriated** in three successive convoys to Tshikapa and Kamonia, in Kasai Province. Repatriates are being transported from Lóvua settlement (Angola) to the border crossing point of Kandjaji, then onto Mugamba Transit Center (where they receive return packages), and then to Tshikapa or Kamonia. Difficult road and weather conditions are posing challenges, nevertheless convoy movements continue. The first convoy to Kananga is planned for mid-November, through Kalamba Mbuji and Bilomba (a way station between Kalamba Mbuji and Kananga).

As of 4 November

Total returnees assisted: 15,255

(14.411 spontaneous returnees / 844 organized repatriations)

Protection and Assistance Response

Organized repatriations

- **Tripartite Agreement:** UNHCR and the Governments of DRC and Angola signed a **Tripartite Agreement** on 23 August, to agree on the legal framework to cover the voluntary and dignified repatriation of Congolese refugees.
- **Transit Centers:** UNHCR and partner AIDES constructed Transit Centers (TCs) in **Kalamba Mbuji** and **Mugamba**, enabling repatriates to receive hot meals, medical and protection screening, and cash assistance. Proper water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are provided on-site to prevent any outbreak of disease. Each TC has a capacity of 500 persons. The Mugamba TC (halfway between the border and Tshikapa) is currently in use for repatriation to Tshikapa. The Kalamba Mbuji TC will be used when repatriation to Kananga begins in mid-November.

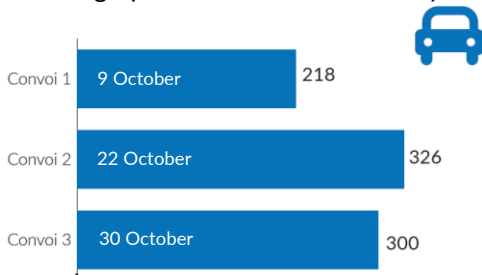


Mugamba Transit Center, halfway between the Angolan border and Tshikapa, Kasai Province. © Ondes du Progrès/Henock Kavua

¹ Figure may include Congolese refugees who were caught up in the waves of expulsions from Angola from October 2018 onwards.

- **Waystation:** UNHCR and partner AIDES set up waystations (WS) in **Kandjaji** (on the way to Tshikapa and Kamonia), and in **Bilomba** (on the way to Kananga) as additional stopping points. This was to avoid convoys spending nights on the road, given difficult weather conditions that are affecting the operation. Both WS have a capacity of 400 people.
- **Transportation:** As of 6 November, UNHCR transported **844 returnees** from Lóvua settlement to Tshikapa and Kamonia (Kasai Province), in three convoys as shown in the graph below. A fourth convoy is underway.

Convoys from Lóvua settlement to Kasai Province (Tshikapa and Kamonia)



Spontaneous returns

- **Verification exercise:** UNHCR identified **14,615 spontaneous returnees**; 2,466 in Kamako (Kasai Province) and 12,149 in Kananga, Kalamba Mbuji and Nkanji, a temporary Government site near Kananga (Kasai Central Province).
- **Transportation:** At the Government's request, UNHCR transported all remaining 6,786 spontaneous returnees in Kalamba Mbuji to Nkanji.
- **Return packages:** UNHCR and WFP provided **return packages** to 14,411 spontaneous returnees. The package is composed of multipurpose cash on one hand, as well as dedicated sums of cash to cover food and transportation expenses to final destinations.
- **Protection monitoring:** UNHCR's partner War Child UK is conducting **protection monitoring** in Kananga, Nkanji site, Kalamba Mbuji, Mugamba, Kamako, and Kamonia. In the first half of October, **491 human rights violations** were reported in Kasai and Kasai Central provinces, including 111 cases of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). UNHCR and War Child UK responded through advocacy, counsel, and referrals to health, police, justice and psychosocial structures.
- **Non-food items (NFIs):** At the onset of spontaneous returns, UNHCR provided tarpaulin sheets to improve living conditions in Nkanji site, Kalamba Mbuji and Kamako.

Good partnerships in action

- **WFP** and implementing partners are providing food and carrying out nutrition activities in Kalamba Mbuji and Nkanji.
- **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** has set up a mobile clinic that moved from Kalamba Mbuji to Nkanji, and provided water installations in Nkanji.
- **Unicef** provided materials to help build in the Kalamba Mbuji TC.
- **UNFPA** is addressing reproductive health and gender-based violence in Kalamba Mbuji, Nkanji and Mugamba and is the Sub-Cluster lead for the Kasai region.

Response gaps

- **Difficult road and weather conditions** are posing challenges for organized convoys, considerably slowing down the pace of the returns. The most problematic sections of the road need urgent rehabilitation.
- Longer-term **health support** to the returnees is needed.
- While the return package has allowed returnees to satisfy their immediate needs, there is a need for **durable solutions** in return areas, including housing, land and property rights, self-reliance activities and peaceful coexistence.
- Rehabilitation of **public infrastructure** is needed in return areas, notably schools, health centers, legal institutions, etc. This should come with capacity building for local authorities.

Contacts

Frederic Cussigh, Head of Kananga Sub-Office, UNHCR Kananga Sub-Office, cussigh@unhcr.org, Tel: +243 819 235 519
Alexandra Stenbock-Fermor, Associate External Relations & Reporting Officer, UNHCR Regional Representation Kinshasa, stenbock@unhcr.org, Tel: +243 822 253 121
Lubiana Gosp-Server, Associate External Relations & Reporting Officer, UNHCR Tshikapa Field Office, gospserv@unhcr.org, Tel: +243 825 777 925